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THESIS

MARTIN LUTHER'S CONVERSION TO THE MONASTIC LIFE
AND
THE INFLUENCES WHICH MADE IT POSSIBLE

Presented by

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

It was a momentous event in the life of Martin Luther when he left the free air of Erfurt University to confine himself to the monastery. This event, according to McGiffert, was the most momentous one in the entire career of Luther. "Upon it hinged all that followed. It cut his life in twain."[1] Not only was the event of great importance in the individual life of Luther, but it proved to be of great importance; first, to the whole of Germany, and later, to the whole world. This event, directly or indirectly, pointed Luther toward the position which he later held as leader of the great Reformation movement, the importance of which, Schaff relates in the following lines:

> The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history. It marks the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Starting from religion, it gave directly or indirectly, a mighty impulse to every forward movement, and made Protestantism the chief propelling force in the history of modern civilization.[2]

Whatever may be the attitude for or against Luther himself, none can ever deny the importance which this event has in

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1. McGiffert, Martin Luther, P.17.
2. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VI. P.1.

human history. Whether we wish to ascribe to Luther the importance of the Reformation, or whether we consider him no more than the mouth-piece through which the German people voiced their griefs, still the importance of this move to the monastery, remains.

There are some limitations in this thesis of which mention should be made. There is no attempt to reconcile the various differing opinions of biographers. At many points the difference of opinion between various Protestant writers is as great as the difference between Protestant and Catholic writers. It is only where evidence is so overwhelming as to demand a conclusion, that the writer suggests it. Even the writings of Luther himself are not to be made strictly consistent. This, however, should not be expected, for when we deal with personalities we are likely to find inconsistencies. Life is not so simple that all of its parts can be easily pressed into a hard mould of consistency. It must be remembered too, that Luther's writings about his early life were not written until after the great conflict with the Roman Church, which may have offered a new color to his thinking.

A few lines about the approach to the thesis may help the reader better to understand the general purpose of this treatment. The writer assumes that no

thorough-going understanding of the conversion of Luther to the monastic life can possibly be had without some knowledge of his early life and the environment into which he was born, and in which he spent his early life and training. If it is impossible to prove that Luther's conversion experience can be traced directly back through his early life to experiences of his childhood, it is equally impossible to prove that the experiences of his earlier years had nothing whatsoever to do with his conversion. The purpose as put forth in this thesis is not that of proving conclusively that Luther's conversion experience can be traced directly to and accounted for in the experiences of his childhood, but rather, by a reconstruction of materials, to show how very improbable it is that Luther's conversion can properly be understood when detached from his early life and environment.

We move therefore to a consideration; first, of the environment; second, of the early life and training; and third, of the conversion experience and its causes.

PART ONE

LUTHER'S ENVIRONMENT

Luther's Environment.

A glance at the domain of Christendom in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries shows that it covered a comparatively small portion of the world.

POLITICAL SITUATION

Its territory had diminished greatly since the seventh century. The over-running of the Christian lands by the Saracens and their successors had reduced them greatly. Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, and North Africa westward to the Straits of Gibraltar had belonged to the Christians until the seventh and eighth centuries when they lost them to the Moslems.

> More than 700 years - twenty generations ago - the Mohammedan Moors, after conquering the African Shores of the Mediterranean, had pushed on into Spain and threatened Christendom from the west. Defeated and checked at the great battle of Tours in 732, after a struggle of 700 years they still held a foot-hold in Spain - the rich southern province of Granada.[1]

And we find them inhabiting the land there until the last decade of the fifteenth century. One of the dominant characteristics of Western Europe preceding the Reformation was consolidation or coalescence. Feudalism was rapidly breaking down, and new nations were being formed under Monarchies which tended to become absolute.

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1. Seebohm, Frederic, The Era of the Protestant Revolution, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1875.

This consolidation movement spread to include five nations. In England, France, and Spain there developed great united kingdoms. In Germany and Italy the spirit had been felt, but was not so easily materialized. However, in these nations the principle showed itself in the formation of strong principalities and states which resembled kingdoms. Germany was a more or less loose coalition of independent states which gave to the house of Hapsburg the imperial title. Much of the country was cut up by innumerable principalities. Almost every ruling prince had to cross some neighbor's land to reach the outlying parts of his dominion. But with all this division and confusion, there developed a sense of unitedness in the minds of all the people, peasant and noble alike. "The dream of ecclesiastical unity brought also the aspiration for political oneness."[1]

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1. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, Vol. I. P.36.

The commercial and economic life of Germany was so inseparably bound up with the social life that all may well be treated in the same paragraph.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

These very brief generalizations are to be qualified by many exceptions, but for the purpose of helping simply to form a background for this thesis, they may suffice. Much of the spirit for unity, of which mention has already been made, found expression in the developing town life of Germany. While in some parts of Europe, national trade organizations were developing, Germany continued to carry on an extensive commerce through her independent towns. "Next to Italy, Germany was furtherest of all modern nations from having attained national unity."[1]

> In medieval times each town was an independent economic center, and the regulation of industry and of trade was an exclusively municipal affair.[2]

The towns had originally grown up under the protection of the Emperor, or of some great lord of the soil, or of some ecclesiastical prince, and the early officials were the representatives of these fostering powers, and their descendants were known as the "patricians" of the city. The workmen organizations were called "guilds." Their chief offices tended also to become hereditary in some

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1. Seebohm, The Era of the Protestant Revolution, P.27
2. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol.I, P.80.

of the leading families, and this created a second "patriciat." These guilds represented organizations full of business energy. The greatest detriment to the German merchant was found at home.

> The mass of the feudal lords were petty and poor and yet proud and independent, resisting any attempts of the powers above them, whether Emperor, or Diets, or Princes, to control them. They claimed the right of waging war; and, by their petty feuds, the public peace was always being broken.1

Germany was full of free nobles, and each considered himself as an independent sovereign power, to do as he pleased regardless of how small his possessions might be. He could make trade almost impossible between territories whose produce had to cross his lands. There was no limit to the tolls or custom dues which he might charge. In spite of all this disunity there gradually developed, however, a capitalist class in Germany. Beside the thriving trade which developed, and made many trading merchants very wealthy, there was another source for helping produce the capitalist class. The management of universal systems of indulgences proved to be very profitable. It was through this means that the Fuggers of Augsburg became the wealthy capitalists. This development of trade and wealth made

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1. Seebohm, The Era of the Protestant Revolution, P. 31

the town of course the center of wealth. Wealth poured into the towns and they became the centers of high life and of learning and of art. There naturally followed also a severance of the poor from the rich. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. In the cities there developed a poor class, the proletariat. With the wealth and high spirited life of the German city came also a coarseness disgraceful to any class.

Over against the high spirited and wealthy life of the city was to be contrasted the dull and serious life of the country. There is a very real danger at this point in generalizing about the lot of the peasant of Germany, for not all peasants had the same lot. The condition of the peasant depended largely upon the kind of over-lord he had. But in any case the life of the peasant may well be contrasted with that of the burger. The peasant was not without his diversion, however. Church festival days offered the peasant an opportunity to get together after church service with his fellow-peasants and spend the afternoon eating, drinking, and dancing. In the winter it was the custom for the young women to meet in some large room, the village tavern, or in some home, to do their spinning. Young men came to the meetings to

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pick the lint from the skirts of the spinners while they worked, and to sing and recite to them. After work came the dance, and on festival evenings, and especially carnival nights, the lads treated their lady friends to a late dinner and dance, and escorted them home. Most of our oldest folk-songs have come from these singing parties in the spinning room.

> These descriptions apply to the German peasants of Central and Southern Germany. In the North and North-east, the agricultural population, which was for the most part of Slavonic descent, had been reduced by their conquerors to a serfdom which had no parallel in the more favored districts.[1]

There had been many social revolts among the peasants of German descent for more than a century. The first great successful peasant revolt was that of the four forest Cantons in Switzerland.

> The Swiss had formerly belonged to the German Empire, and had the Empire done justice between them and their lords, they would have been glad enough to remain free peasants of the Empire; but as the Empire helped their lords instead of them, they threw off the yoke of the Empire. They were soon joined by other neighboring Cantons, and their flag, with its white cross on a red ground, became the flag of a new nation, the Swiss Confederacy.[2]

They convinced themselves and many other peasants that

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1. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.94
2. Seebohm, The Era of the Protestant Revolution, P.61.

a peasant made as good a soldier as a noble. This victory gave a great impetus and encouragement to other peasants to free themselves from their over-lords. It must be said that while the social tumults which featured the close of the Middle Ages are rightly called peasant insurrections, they might well be considered more than peasant complaints. They were revolts of the poor against the rich. The townspeople fell in line with the peasants, and in many cases the revolts were led by the poor townsmen. Very closely associated with this hatred against the rich was a constant detestation for the priest, not because he was a representative of the Church, but because he figured very materially toward making the financial burden of the poor heavier. The tithes he imposed, and the methods he used to collect them brought against him a bitter disfavor from the peasants. This must not be taken to mean that the people were irreligious or disfavorable toward the Church at Rome. It simply meant that the peasant had awakened to see that he had some rights, and one of those rights was that he could voice his disfavor against the financial burden which had been made greater by the priest. Many of the insurrections, in fact, started with a religious enthusiasm. The case of the revolt led by Hans Bohm was characteristic of many other moves to gain rights for the peasants and

poorer classes. The poor German people had many causes for complaint. It is not to be wondered at if the German people of the country came to be regarded as a serious-minded and stern people. They had lost heavily a few decades previously when the "black plague" visited Germany. They had suffered most severely from the cycle of famine years from 1490 to 1503. These famine years brought an almost unbearable situation to these poor people of the country. It is significant that it was during this period of poverty and suffering that the most determined and desperate social risings took place.

> It was into this mass of seething discontent that the spark of religious protest fell - the one thing needed to fire the train and kindle the social conflagration. This was the society to which Luther spoke, and its discontent was the sounding-board which made his words reverberate.[1]

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF GERMANY BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

If it can be said that any one phase of the environment of Luther's early life influenced him most it might well be named the religious environment. No appreciable understanding of Luther's religious experiences at any time in his life can be had without some knowledge of the popular religious thought of his age. No

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1.Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.113.

man, no matter how unique he is, can wholly escape the customs, traditions, and thought of his age. Much less could Luther escape this enthusiastic religious thought and tradition which swept the country, bringing with it innumerable observations of feasts and pilgrimages. Lindsay tells us that the real roots of the spiritual life of Luther and of the other reformers ought to be sought for in the family and in the popular religious life of the times.[1]

One of the dominant characteristics in the religious life of the German people, the half century before the Reformation, was their devotion to the medieval Church and to the Pope. Now, we are not to think that this necessarily contradicts the detest which the mass of the poor people and many others held toward the priests who were supposed to represent the Church. These grudges were aimed against the priests more or less individually at first but came later to be aimed against the priest class. Even then, it must be remembered that the German people could protest against the practices of the priests of the Church without any thought whatsoever of doing harm to the Church. In most cases it must be said that the protests were believed rather to help the

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1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.114

Church instead of doing it harm. Aleander, papal nuncio at the Diet of Worms, tells of his astonishment at the signs of dissatisfaction which he met in 1520. He says that down to 1510 (the date of his last visit) he had never been with a people so devoted to the Bishop of Rome. The Germans were especially susceptible to religion. No land was more surely depended upon by the papal curia for Roman revenue than was Germany. She surpassed all others in the building of churches, the buying of indulgences, and the visiting of shrines. The whole land of Germany was filled with churches. Every little village had its chapel, and every town had several churches. Monasteries and convents rapidly increased in Germany. The wealthy burghers filled the town churches with expensive painted windows, draped her walls with treasured paintings, and fine tapestries, and made many of the larger churches museums and treasure houses.

A counter movement in the religious life of Germany was taking place in the form of preaching. Influential churchmen began to protest against the services of the church, and asked for sermons. They claimed that the primary function of the priest should be that of preaching. The people had begun to read the Bible in the vernacular, thus making it necessary for the priests to instruct their

congregations by intelligent preaching. Here is the beginning of a movement which later proves to be of a very great assistance to the Reformation. The freedom and new learning of the Renaissance had thrown a new light on every phase of life, not excluding the religious life. Preachers arose to voice their convictions regardless of tradition of the Church. No one single statement can describe the situation, for while the German people were considered loyal to the Roman Church and the Pope, there arose independent preachers who rejected the tradition of the Church, and these preachers, as we shall see, attracted great followings. John Geiler was such a person.

> He lashed the vices and superstitions of his time. He denounced relic worship, pilgrimages, buying indulgences, and the corruption in the monasteries and convents.[1]

This seemed inconsistent with the loyal devotion of which mention has been made, and in fact it is. Times were changing too rapidly for any one condition long to remain wholly true.

The family religious life for the most part was simple, and carried a strong evangelical instruction. A few indirect gleanings give us an idea of what was taught in the homes of pious families. We know, for example, that Luther learned the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the

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1. Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.118

Lord's Prayer.[1] He knew also some of the simple evangelical hymns.[2] Beyond this little is known of further definite instruction in the home.

It must be noted that the religious life in the home, however, could not be left to remain so simple, and untouched by the popular religious thought of the day. It is true that much of the theology of the day was learned after the youth left the home circles, but much of the popular religious thought of the day came into the home. The superstitions and fear in the religion of the day could not be kept from the home, it went everywhere. The great religious revival which came in the last half of the fifteenth century, making popular the many religious pilgrimages, offered also the revival and spread of much religious superstition. Shrines were to be found throughout the whole country, and peasant and burgher alike were swept into the enthusiasm of the revival. Near Luther's home in Mansfeld were noted pilgrimage places. It must be pointed out again in connection with this religious revival that during the last decades of the fifteenth century a great fear brooded over Central Europe, especially over Germany. The incessant visits of the plagues, new diseases, and the continual fear of Turkish

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1. Cf. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.VI,P.108.
2. Cf. Smith, Martin Luther, P.3.

invasion all served to produce a people full of fear. And naturally enough

> It was fear that lay at the basis of this crude revival of religion which marks the closing decades of the fifteenth century.[1]

All of this gave rise to an urgent restlessness, and laid open people's minds to the many prophecies of evil. Most anything mysterious or unusual was immediately accepted and spread. We shall have occasion to deal with some of these prophecies more in detail when we come to consider how they actually figured in Luther's life. These generalizations will suffice for the present time.

> Such was the religious atmosphere into which Luther was born, and which he breathed from his earliest days.[2]

EXPRESSION OF RELIGION THROUGH THE MONASTERY

We cannot dismiss the subject of the religious life in Germany without some word about that institution which had for centuries represented the highest type of religious life in the country. The monastery had, generally speaking, always attracted the finest of religiously-minded young people, and in this late fifteenth century it had grown to extreme

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1.Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.129
2.Ibid. P.157

popularity. After the pious religion in the home had its word, and the religious revival had run its course, the monastery remained the logical place for those who were not yet satisfied. It furnished a life toward which the young person who would make religion a life business naturally turned. Those to whom the ordinary religious life did not bring assurance of salvation, and satisfaction turned naturally to the monastic life. It was the haven to the youth who sought contentment in matters of religion, and rest of soul from the daily routine of ordinary life. Religiously-minded young people naturally gravitated to the monastic communities, and as we shall see, Luther was no exception to this rule.

PART TWO

LUTHER'S EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING

Luther's Early Life and Training.

HIS FAMILY

Martin Luther came from peasant stock. His father, his grandfather, and great-grandfather were all peasants, and Martin seemed to be proud that he had come from such stock. He said to Melanchthon on one occasion, "I am a peasant's son: my father, grandfather, all my ancestors were genuine peasants."[1] Luther is evidently speaking here of the Luther side of the family, for his mother's home was, before she married, in Eisenach. But Luther was reared among the peasants, and the Luthers were, for generations back, peasants. "He was of the common people and was glad of it. It was one of the secrets of his power."[2] It is impossible to have an appreciable understanding of Luther or his works unless we consider him as distinctly German, and as a leader of the common German people in thought, word, and act. He spoke their language and they recognized him as their leader. Whatever criticism may be made of Luther's plain language, his coarse words, and as some consider, his vulgar phrases, it must be remembered that he spoke the language of the common people from whom he came and for whom he became leader. The very fact that

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1.Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.VI,P.106
2.McGiffert, Martin Luther, P.4.

he spoke in terms well-known made him better the leader of these people.

Now, while it is true that the Luthers were of peasant stock, they were not the poorest class, because they had owned their house for generations back. Martin's father, Hans Luther, grew to manhood at Mohra, near Eisenach in Thuringia. He had at least two brothers, but Hans was the eldest.

> But at Mohra the law of primogeniture, which vests the possessions of the land in the eldest son was not recognized; either the property was equally divided, or, as was customary in other parts of the country, the estate fell to the share of the youngest.[1]

MacKinnon and Smith tell us that the possessions here in Mohra were transmitted from one generation to another through the youngest son.[2] In any case evidence seems overwhelming that Hans Luther had to labor hard to get along. Hans was a miner, so naturally the rich mines in Mansfeld county held for him some attraction. We do not know when he left Mohra whether he wanted to go directly to the town of Mansfeld, or not, but he stopped in Eisleben which was attracting many miners at that time. Eisleben lay in the county of Mansfeld, between

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1. Köestlin, Martin Luther, P.3.
2. MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.I, P.1

Mohra and the town of Mansfeld. Hans married Margaret Ziegler from Eisenach and the two travelled to Eisleben, and remained there for a few months before going to Mansfeld. It was while the young couple resided here in Eisleben that their first son was born. He was born on November 10, 1483, and he was baptized the next day and named Martin after the saint whose feast was then being kept. The story of Martin in the little town of Eisleben is very short, for he lived there only about six months. The family moved on to Mansfeld where the parents lived the remainder of their years, and where Martin spent his childhood.

It is very easy for biographers to make Luther's conditions always unusual. It is used unconsciously sometimes as a means of explaining the very unusual attainments and results of his work. But, for the most part, Luther's early home life was not peculiar to that of the average Middle Class home of his age. It is true that his parents were poor, probably very poor for awhile after coming to Mansfeld, but we are not justified in believing that the Luther family always remained very poor. Grisar suggests that Luther's early career differed little from that of the poorest

students of his day.[1] But even though Hans Luther was very poor at the beginning of his stay at Mansfeld, it was not many years until he owned, or leased pits and furnaces. He was elected to the Town Council, which was the most honored position of the community. Luther, after many years away from home, tells of his poverty as a boy. But the narrative of his mother carrying firewood from the forest, or the story of his singing in Mansfeld streets need not be interpreted as indicating extreme poverty.

> The carrying of firewood from the forest was usual in peasant families, and street singing for philanthropic or religious purposes was customary among the children of even affluent burgesses.[2]

HOME DISCIPLINE

The strict discipline and severe punishment of which Luther speaks in later years must not be considered peculiar to the Luther household. There is no doubt but what Luther received punishment for crimes which in later years seemed to him too trivial to warrant the punishment which he received. But many other boys must have felt the same way about themselves for the life of the people was stern,[3] and parents held their children

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1. Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.5
2. MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.2.
3. McGiffert, Martin Luther, P. 8.

to a very strict discipline. Both the Luther parents were very strict. Many years later Luther said:

> My father once whipped me so severely that I fled from him, and it was hard for him to win me back. My mother once beat me until the blood flowed, for having stolen a miserable nut. It was this strict discipline which finally forced me into the monastery, although they meant heartily well by it.[1]

Luther deplores the cruel treatment of his childhood and points to the way in which he treats his children as a better example. Luther does not forget, however, that his children lived in another age from that in which he spent his childhood, and under different conditions. He is broad minded enough also that in his writings he does not fail to make distinction between the attitude which he holds against the punishment which he received at the hands of his parents, and his personal attitude toward his parents. However positive Luther was against the kind of treatment he received from his parents, he was able to hold a very high regard for them. "Luther admits that they meant well by him. In later life, he cherished a deep affection and gratitude toward them."[2]

We must not gather from the remarks from Luther, however, that all in the Luther household

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1. Smith, Martin Luther, P. 2.
2. MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.I, P.3

life was stern and solemn. There were times of laughter and joy. We misrepresent the actual situation if we hold that Luther's home life was continuous martyrdom. It is a very natural thing that Luther, writing in later life about his childhood, should remember most vividly those experiences which were accompanied by physical pain, and the childish fears which developed from them. It must be noted that Luther's play life at home was very scanty. He was the eldest in the family of two boys and three girls, and he left home very young to attend school at Magdeburg. His early life was not as it might have been had he not been the eldest child, or if he had remained at home to have more companionship with his younger brother and sisters. He rarely saw them after he left for Magdeburg, and the fact that he never wrote to them suggests that his childhood relationship with them while he was at home was not very intimate. But granting all of this, still Luther tells us of joyous hours at home. He writes of how his father could jest and sing over a glass of beer with his friends, sometimes taking more than was necessary.

> Nor was his mother always scolding and thrashing her young brood, and Luther mentions a little song which she used to sing to him and which tends to show that, if she was not

> too well liked among her neighbors, she too had her jocose moments. Melanchthon, who later knew her intimately, speaks admiringly of her matronly virtues and her piety, and says that she was held in high esteem by other respectable women as an example of a virtuous life.[1]

Mention has been made already in the consideration of family religious life in the times of Luther concerning what was commonly taught in the pious home, and the simple instruction which Luther himself received. There is little room to believe that Luther's religious instruction and environment at home differed greatly from that of the average pious home. The claim that Hans Luther was anti-ecclesiastical, and disliked monks, priests, and the Church has little valid support. It is true that he was greatly disappointed when Martin decided to become a monk, but the disappointment came because Martin was giving up his bright future in law. It was a very natural thing that Hans, after educating his son to be a lawyer, would be disappointed at his giving up all to enter the monastery. The municipal records of Mansfeld reveal Hans Luther as a good churchman, who associates with the priests and other burgesses in

RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS IN LUTHER'S HOME

1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.4

observing and maintaining the ecclesiastical usages of the time.[1] Luther took part in the church festivals, and shared in the invocation of the saints, especially the Virgin and her mother St. Anna, the patron saint of the miners. Luther learned a few simple prayers and hymns at his mother's knee, besides the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer.

> God the Father and Jesus were represented to him as stern, nay, cruel judges, to appease whose just wrath the intercession of the saints must be secured.[2]

There is much evidence that Luther was greatly influenced by the superstition of which mention has been made. Smith tells us that Luther never freed himself from it. But not all must be thought of as dark for the boy Luther, for while it is true that Jesus was represented largely as a stern judge, still Luther was assured that he could have the intercession of the saints, the Virgin, and the apostles. Though Christ as Saviour was discernible in the liturgy and symbolism of the Church, it had little meaning for Luther, for his mind was filled with the idea of Jesus as a stern judge. His youthful eyes had fallen upon the paintings in the Church windows in which Jesus was pictured as judge seated upon a throne ready

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1.Cf.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.5.
2. Smith, Martin Luther, P. 3.

to pass judgment upon all sinners. There is overwhelming evidence that Luther's predominant thought of Jesus was that he was a stern, cruel judge, and that Luther's religious life was saturated with fear and superstition there is little cause to doubt.

LUTHER'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DAYS

The public school at Mansfeld where Luther began his school career was without doubt crude to compare with the schools of the city in later times. Luther, in writing about his Mansfeld school days later in life, ridicules its crude administration, but Luther has been accused, and justly so, of comparing the village school of Mansfeld in his childhood days with better schools which existed in his later life. There is no reason to believe that the Mansfeld school was essentially different from other small village schools. We have spoken already of the strict discipline in the Luther home.

> In the school the discipline was equally severe, and the rod took the place of kindly admonition. He remembered to have been chastised no less than fifteen times in one single morning.[1]

But

> Scheel questions the usual version of the unbridled brutality of his

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1. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.VI,P.108

> teachers at Mansfeld, in view of the general testimony of the regulations applicable to the schools of the period of Luther's youth. Whilst these show the firm belief, on the part of the municipal authorities in the efficacy of the rod in the maintenance of discipline, they forbid arbitrary and excessive punishments.[1]

This, of course, does not prove anything conclusively, for we are not sure that the teachers of the Mansfeld school always complied with the general rules of the municipal authorities, nor are we altogether certain that the local municipal authorities followed the general regulation applicable to the schools of the period of Luther's youth. But if Luther was chastised fifteen times for misbehavior in one morning, we are compelled to question the severity of the first fourteen chastisements. Luther studied Latin in the Mansfeld school, and he compares the seriousness of an examination to that of a trial for murder. Religious knowledge and music were taught also. Luther, no doubt, received training in music here which helped to win him a comfortable home when he went to Eisenach to school. Luther in later years, although he does ridicule the crudeness of the school, praises Donatus, Aesops Fables, and Cato's Moral Maxims.

1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.10

When Luther was about thirteen years old, he went to Magdeburg to school. The fact that the young lad was willing to leave home to go to school speaks well for him, and the fact also that his parents were willing to spare him from home speaks for their interest in seeing Martin educated.

> He had learned to speak the colloquial Latin of his time and had been drilled in Latin grammar, in the elements of the faith, and the moral tales and maxims which formed the subject matter of the reading books.[1]

From Luther's statement in later life that he went to school in Magdeburg with the Nollbruder, some have supposed it to have been a Latin school of the "Brethren," but Scheel holds that Luther attended the cathedral school and that the Brethren of the Common Life taught there. It is impossible to know just how much Luther was influenced by these pious brethren, but it is a safe conjecture that they did nothing which would influence him away from the Church, and they probably influenced him in the direction of the monastery, although at the time he was not definitely conscious of such direction. These Brethren had influenced many a youth to the monastic life, in fact, the Brethren of the Common Life constituted a fraternity of pious men who strove to deepen the religious

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1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.I, P.13

life of youth through the means of teaching. Although they were considered reformers, they were not so in the later doctrinal sense, but they were rather orthodox churchmen who, whilst striving to deepen the traditional piety and reform ecclesiastical abuses, conformed to conventional beliefs and practice. Luther was very likely favorably impressed by the ecclesiastical pomp, and the stately ceremonies which he observed in Magdeburg, for it was the seat of an arch-bishopric, and the ecclesiastical interests dominated the city. He was greatly impressed while in Magdeburg with the observation of the monastic self-denial and devotion manifested by Prince William of Anhaltzerbst, who was guardian of the Franciscan monastery. Luther relates the incident in the following words:

> When, in my fourteenth year, I went to school at Magdeburg, I saw with my own eyes a Prince of Anhalt....who went in a friar's cowl on the highways to beg bread, and carried a sack like a donkey, so heavy that he bent under it, but his companion walked by him without a burden; this Prince alone might serve as an example of the grisly, shorn holiness of the world. They had so stunned him that he did all the works of the cloister like any other brother, and he had so fasted, and watched, and mortified his flesh that he looked like a death's head, mere skin and bones; indeed he soon after died, for he could not long bear such a severe life. In short,

> whoever looked at him had to gasp
> for pity and must needs be ashamed
> of his own worldly position.[1]

Luther's instruction under the Brethren was of definite religious character. The Brethren fostered the reading of the Bible in the vernacular, and it may have been here that Luther first became acquainted with the vernacular Bible, if the incident which Luther relates in his Table Talk took place during his sojourn in Magdeburg.[2] In accordance with the customs of the time, Luther earned his bread by singing in the streets.

After having spent one year in Magdeburg, Luther was sent to Eisenach to St. George's school where he remained three years. The Luther family had friends in Eisenach, and MacKinnon suggests that this fact figured in the decision to send Martin there to school. His mother had in Eisenach, which was her native town, a relative named Conrad Hutter, and she counted on him to help Martin. Hutter was sexton of St. Nicholas Church and it may have been through him that Luther learned to know and to love the parish priest, John Braun.[3] It is not certain just how the Luthers expected Hutter to help their boy, and if they expected him to send Martin through school they were disappointed, for he sang in the streets for his bread just as he had

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1.Smith, Martin Luther, P. 4.
2.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.14
3.Cf Smith, Martin Luther, P. 4.

done in Magdeburg. This did not last, however, for Luther won the sympathy of a lady, the wife of a wealthy merchant, named Frau Cotta. She took him into her home where Luther tasted for the first time modest comfort, and where he also learned a culture which wasto help him later in dealing with all classes of men. Luther, long after his school days in Eisenach, speaks with pleasure of the days spent in the home of "his hostess of Eisenach." This wealthy Cotta family had founded a little Franciscan monastery at the foot of the Wartburg, with whose inmates Luther became very friendly.

Eisenach was filled with the spirit of the religious revival. The whole town was under the spell of St. Elizabeth, the pious landgravine, who had given up family life and earthly comforts to earn a saintship. The town contained nine monasteries and nunneries.[1]

Luther was pleased with the school and the teachers in Eisenach. The teachers far surpassed his previous ones, and Trebonius, the principal of the school, was a favorite of Luther. McGiffert suggests that here Luther came in contact with the new humanistic spirit and method for the first time.[2] If McGiffert means by

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1. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.195.
2. McGiffert, Martin Luther, P. 11.

this, as some later biographers have maintained, that Trebonius was an ardent humanist, he is refuted by MacKinnon:

> That he was an ardent humanist is an assumption of later biographers. It finds no support in the details given by Melanchthon, who would hardly have omitted to mention the fact. What he does say is that it was at Erfurt that he turned his attention to the Latin classics as a welcome diversion from the scholastic theology. What Trebonius taught him more efficiently than elsewhere was the more advanced course of grammar, rhetoric, and poetry, as contained in the medieval textbooks.[1]

Under the instruction of this worthy rector, Luther made great progress in the higher Latin grammar, in composition, versification, and discourse. He easily outdid his fellow-students in these studies. This excellent training at Eisenach which extended over three years fitted Luther to enter on a course of academic study in Erfurt in the spring of 1501. The fact that he took his bachelor's degree from Erfurt at the end of one year may rightly be accredited to the superior preparation which he received in Eisenach. It was a considerable step upwards when Luther moved from the school in Magdeburg to St. George's in Eisenach, but after spending three years there he is ready to step

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1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.17

into the greatest university in Germany. Luther had done so well in Eisenach that we do not wonder that his father was proud of him and was willing to pay his way in the great university.

LUTHER'S UNIVERSITY LIFE AT ERFURT

Erfurt, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, was known locally as "little Rome." She owned the feudal superiority of the archbishop of Maintz and the elector of Saxony, and was the seat of a suffragan bishop. So outstanding was the city of Erfurt that it deserves a little treatment here separate from the university. The origin of the city of Erfurt is obscure, but as early as 741 it was important enough for St. Boniface to found a bishopric there. It was reabsorbed however in 755 in that of Maintz. In 1255 archbishop Gerhard I had to grant the city municipal rights, the burgraviate disappeared, and Erfurt became practically a free town. It reached the height of its power in the early part of the fifteenth century when it joined the Hanseatic League, but still in the time of Luther it was a great city. Its wealth was so great that in 1378 it established a university, the first in Europe that embraced the four faculties. By 1483 the over lordship of Erfurt was ul-

timately transferred by the electors of Maintz to Saxony.[1] And at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Erfurt, then with twenty thousand inhabitants, counted over one hundred religious buildings - churches, monasteries, and hospitals. Its numerous monastic orders included the famous Augustinian Eremits, of whom Luther was ultimately to become a member. Its position on the highway between north and south Germany, and the fertility of the surrounding territory made it the center of a considerable trade industry.[2] It must be said also that its fame was made greater by its university.

In Luther's day the fame of Erfurt University far exceeded that of any other German university. In the fifteenth century the number of its students was naturally larger than that of any other German university - a fact attributable partly to the reputation it had acquired as a school of jurisprudence, and partly to the ardor with which the nominalist and realist controversies of the time were debated in its midst.

> It had been founded in 1392 by the burghers of the town, who were intensely proud of their own university, and especially of the fact that it had far surpassed other seats of learning which owed their origin to princes. The academic and

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1. Cf. Encyclopedia Brittanica, Vol. IX, P.736.
2. Cf. MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.I,P.18

> burgher life were allied at Erfurt as they were in no other university town.[1]

The university was also allied to the Church, and different popes had enriched it with privileges. Many of its professors held ecclesiastical prebends; each faculty was under the protection of a tutelary saint; and the teachers were compelled to swear that they would teach nothing opposed to the doctrines of the Roman Church. It must not be thought from this, however, that Erfurt university, in comparison with other universities, was non-progressive.

Its students were exposed to a considerable variety of influences:

> Its theology represented the more modern type of scholastic, the Scotist; its philosophy was the nominalist teaching of William of Occam, whose great disciple, Gabriel Biel, had been one of its celebrated professors; the system of biblical interpretation, first introduced by Nicholas de Lyra, had been long taught at Erfurt by a succession of his able masters; humanism had won an early entrance and in Luther's time the Erfurt circle of 'poets' was already famous.[2]

Smith tells us that the studies were "sicklied o'er with a pale cast" of scholasticism, and that medieval

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1.Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol.I, P.195
2.Ibid. P.196

thought had progressed little, if at all, beyond Aristotle, who was regarded always as an authority.[1] Even the most celebrated professors at Erfurt, Trutvetter and Usingen, were entirely under the sway of the Stagirite. The natural sciences were studied without experiment or original research, relying always upon the ancient works of Aristotle. There is a real danger in generalizing about the studies at Erfurt, for changes were rapidly being made. The old medieval course was meeting with strong opposition. The rebirth of classical antiquity had penetrated here; there were several courses in the classics and a circle of students were devoted to the humanities. Luther, although he did read some of the Latin authors privately and learned something of Greek, had no time for humanist lectures. He did read Virgil, Plautus, Cicero, Livy, Terrance, and Horace. He seemed also to have read a volumn of selections from Propertius, Persius, Lucretius, Tibullus, Silarius, Italicus, Statius, and Claudius.[2] Latin was the language of the classroom in Erfurt as everywhere else, and it became a second mother-tongue to him, as to all scholars of the day; but Luther never became elegant in Latin composition. The bachelor's degree in Arts included courses extending

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1. Smith, Martin Luther, P. 5.
2. Cf. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P. 197

over eighteen months, in grammar, logic, rhetoric, physics, and philosophy, in accordance with the system of Aristotle. Luther took the Bachelor of Arts degree in the autumn of 1502. The studies required for the master's degree included, besides higher instruction in the subjects previously studied, mathematics, metaphysics, and ethics. At the age of twenty-two Luther secured second place in a list of seventeen candidates who passed the master's examination in the winter of 1505.

A number of accusations have been made against Luther and his immoral life while in the University of Erfurt. There is little doubt that there was considerable immorality in the Erfurt student body, but to use this as an argument that Luther must have taken part in the loose living is argument without reason. The prevalence of loose living in the University should not condemn all to that same sin.

> Dungersheim, in a pamphlet against Luther the heretic, harps back to the years he spent at Erfurt as a secular student and accuses him of evil habits, probably contracted then, but the after effects of which made themselves felt when he had entered into religion and caused him to rebel against his profession.[1]

Dungersheim plays on Luther's statement concerning the

1.Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.26.

impossibility of a "religious" being able to keep the vow of chastity. "The inability," he maintains, "could only be due to a certain 'former bad habit,' of which stories were told." In another writing this same opponent accuses Luther of having indulged in the greatest vice during his academic years, and mentions as his informer one of the comrades who had, later on, accompanied Luther to the gate of the monastery.

> He says nothing, perhaps, indeed, he knew nothing more definite, and with regard to Luther's life in religion, he is unable to adduce anything to his discredit.[1]

One of Luther's later adversaries, Emser, in his rejoiner to Luther, reprimands Luther for having exposed some of his immoral deeds, and suggests that if it were not for returning evil for evil he could tell some things about Luther which would show that he too had fallen. When Luther in his later years speaks of "sins of his youth" he does not mean what some of his opponents had tried to represent; namely, that his youth had been immoral, but, as Grisar suggests, he means rather the good works of his monastic life, even the celebration of the Holy Mass. Smith says:

> Of the student's life little is known. That it was pure and godly

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1.Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.27.

> may be referred from the fact that his enemies never found any reproach in it and because of the absence of self-accusation.[1]

Evidently Smith does not consider the above stories seriously. It must be said that the accusations made against Luther's moral character are all made long after these Erfurt days in which he is said to have committed the crimes. Lindsay has nothing to say against Luther's character.

> The scanty accounts of Luther's student days show that he was a hard-working, bright, sociable youth and musical to the core.[2]

Schaff gives the following interesting lines:

> His moral conduct was unblemished and the mouth of slander did not dare to blacken his reputation till after the theological passions roused by the Reformation. He went regularly to Mass and observed the daily devotions of a sincere Catholic. He chose for his motto: To pray well is half the study. He was a devout worshiper of the Virgin Mary.[3]

Boehmer discusses in detail the personal habits and character of Luther, but not once does he make reference to any accused immorality of Luther as student in Erfurt University.

He attacks the accusations of Denifle

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1. Smith, Martin Luther, P. 6.
2. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol.I, P.197.
3. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.VI, P.111.

one after another, and it seems reasonable that if the accusations made against Luther's Erfurt student days carried any considerable evidence Boehmer would have considered them along with the many which he does discuss.[1] Fife tells us that no student was admitted to the final examination unless the supervising Master of Arts would testify to his solidity of character and this had to be confirmed by a special examining commission.[2] But even under such control many students were to be found who indulged in dissipation, and charges of this kind have been brought against Luther but they find no support in the sources.[3] Certainly with such control as the University enforced, there would have at least been ample opportunity at that time to expose Luther if he was immoral. To suppose that Luther was extremely riotous, is not consistent with the kind of work he did at Erfurt. He cannot very well be accused of having been at that time an excessive drinker, for even Denifle claims that he began his excessive drinking as late as 1521.

Luther held high regard for his teachers, especially Trutvetter, and Usingen. Even when he later criticises the scholastic method and doctrine in which they had trained him, he still respects highly these professors.

1.Cf.Boehmer, Luther in the Light of Recent Research, Ch.VII
2.Cf.Fife, Young Luther, P.55
3.Ibid. P.56.

Erfurt, when it came to philosophy, was definitely modern. It was an Occamist University, and all its Masters professed the nominalistic philosophy as expounded by William of Occam. Luther became an enthusiastic "Modern," and even when he comes to differ with Occam in theology, he still retains his philosophic teaching.[1] Grisar suggests that Luther's study of scholasticism, however, was altogether inadequate, and that scholasticism as represented by Occam and his "modern" disciples in their nominalism did not represent the best in scholasticism, but rather, in their modern extremes misrepresented it in its fuller and better meaning. The great schoolmen of the Middle Ages were almost unknown to Luther.[2] It should be remembered that when Luther later condemns scholasticism as a whole, he does it indiscriminately, for he knew only the Occam, or "modern" interpretation as given in the nominalistic view. Luther, while he became enthusiastic in Erfurt with the study of scholasticism as he found it there, made no attempt, then or later, to familiarize himself with the learning of Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, or Bonaventure, notwithstanding the fact that their teachings had taken first place in the Church owing to the approval of the

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1.Cf. MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.I, P.20
2.Cf. Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.130.

Holy See. This is not the place for a discussion of the results of Luther's study of Occam in Erfurt for that would carry beyond the period with which this thesis deals. It should be noted in passing, however, that the effects of Luther's study in Occamistic philosophy in Erfurt University weigh as heavily toward the negative influences as they do toward the positive ones. In fact we cannot trace the influences of the Occamist school in the life and works of Luther without a consideration of his later break with that philosophy, for even though he condemns it, especially as it applies to theology, its major effects are seen not until after that condemnation. This is only one example of many seeming inconsistencies which both friend and foe of Luther will ascribe to his person.

> The true explanation seems, however, to be that his judgment of the Aristotelian philosophy varied according as he thought of it from the purely philosophical or from the purely Christian standpoint. From the former it is evident that he cherished a deep sense of its value and owed much to it as an intellectual discipline..... From the Christian standpoint, on the other hand, he subjects him to a severe criticism and makes ample use of his gift of strong language in denouncing him. 'Aristotle,' he says, 'knows nothing of the soul, of God, and immortality, and Cicero far excels him in these subjects.'[1]

1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.23

We may say in conclusion, therefore, that although Luther was a good student of philosophy, it never became his religion at any time. He was always able to make a distinction between philosophy and religion. And although his training in philosophy may have helped him in putting forth his religious doctrines, it should never be confused with those doctrines. For Luther, philosophy was one thing, and religion quite another. Therefore, for this very distinction which Luther always makes, the reader should be extremely cautious about holding that Luther's Erfurt training in philosophy influenced him greatly.

Before we pass to a consideration of the conversion experience of Luther to the monastic life, there is one fact about the situation in Erfurt which should be remembered, and it is only mentioned here, because we shall have occasion to discuss it when we come to consider the causes of Luther's conversion. It is, namely this, that while Luther was studying the Occamist philosophy with enthusiasm in Erfurt University, he was at the same time attending meetings of a humanist group, and reading with delight the works of some of the great Latin and Greek scholars. Luther rightly

described this reading as a diversion from his scholastic studies, for it was full of novelty whereas scholasticism of the Occam school made little place for novelty, but depended upon pure logic and reasoning.[1]

1.Cf. Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.84.

PART THREE

LUTHER'S CONVERSION TO THE MONASTIC LIFE AND CAUSES FOR IT

Luther's Conversion to the Monastic Life and Causes for it.

Luther's three years of study in Erfurt University had given him a Master of Arts degree and had satisfied all requirements to enter upon the study of law.

> As Master of Arts, Luther came under an obligation to teach in the faculty for two years. The obligation, did not, however, preclude him from pursuing a course of study in another faculty.[1]

He had done exceptionally good work during the three years, and now at the end of that time it is Luther's great privilege to be one of those to whom is granted the Master of Arts degree, equivalent to the modern Doctor of Philosophy in Germany. The occasion was kept in great solemnity. He walked in line with the favored ones.

> What a moment of majesty and splendor, says Luther, was that when one took the degree of Master, and torches were carried before him. I consider that no temporal or worldly joy can equal it.[2]

The father was so proud of his son's achievements that he showed his sense of this new dignity in addressing

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1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.28.
2.Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.VI, P.111

him as "You" instead of the familiar "Thou." Hans Luther had planned for his son a rich and honorable marriage. He designed for Martin a high position in the world, and the study of law seemed to be the most logical procedure to take. Luther complied with the wishes of his father regarding the study of law, but he confesses in later life that he did so against his own inclination. The faculty of law began its lectures in May. But Luther had hardly attended a month when he became disgusted with such a profession, which seemed to him, to have no relish of salvation in it.

> From a letter to Trebonius two years later (April 1507), it is evident that he was not so keen as his father on more material advancement. As he reminds his old preceptor, he had in Eisenach days been, 'careless of the things of the world and little concerned about riches.' In his Table Talk he was wont to speak disparagingly of the study of jurisprudence. He calls it a sordid profession concerned only with the getting of money.[1]

His attitudes against law may not have been so violent during his few weeks of studying it, but in any case his words suggest that he never was enthusiastic about the profession.

> As Luther was coming back to the University on July second, he was

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1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, P.28.

> overtaken at Strotterheim, near
> Erfurt, by a terrible thunderstorm,
> and, in a fright, vowed to Saint
> Anna to become a monk.[1]

The vow as given by most writers is: "Help, beloved Saint Anna! I will become a monk." This is the generally agreed upon occasion of Luther's decision to enter the monastery. It must be said, however, that when we begin to consider the causes for this decision and the vow to become a monk, we find that various reasons have been assigned to explain it, and writers disagree considerably regarding the relative importance which should be given these various contributing influences.

I have said in the beginning of the thesis that an understanding and explanation of why Luther decided to enter the monastery is impossible without some knowledge of his early life and environment. I shall try to show, on the other hand, how a partial understanding, at least, may be had by a consideration of Luther's early life and his environment and an organization of the contributing influences found in them. This will be done by beginning with the occasion, and from that moving to a consideration of the more immediate causes, and then, where evidence is sufficient to justify it, explaining something of the significance of these immediate causes through

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1. Smith, Martin Luther, P. 9.

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tracing them to more general ones. The writer is not unaware of the fact that some of the leading authorities in this field would disapprove of such treatment, and many limitations are granted, but the evidence at many points is so overwhelming that it offers a strong recommendation to such procedure. If it is impossible, at many points, to prove conclusively that the immediate causes can be traced to experiences in Luther's earlier life, still there remains justification to raise the possibility and discuss it. As a matter of fact, we can never adhere wholly to the conclusively proven facts. No historian closes his mind to the possible, but unproved. Research is not carried on when men refuse to have anything to do with propositions which have not been conclusively proven. We are justified, therefore, in believing where we have not proved.

MacKinnon gives us a criticism of the procedure taken by some biographers of Luther who try to show that the conversion to the monastic life had long been premeditated. He shows how:

> They thus tend to read what is known of his earlier life in the light of this a priori conception of it - to make the crisis of 1505 throw its shadow back over his school and student days.[1]

1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.30.

MacKinnon confesses that there is something to be said for the tracing of such a crisis in previous experience, but that there should always be reasonable evidence to justify such treatment.

> In the case of Luther in particular what evidence there is, is rather scanty and most of it consists either of his own later utterances, or those of his friends and biographers, and is not to be accepted without critical discrimination.[1]

He goes ahead to say that Köehler, Scheel, and A. V. Müller all maintain that Luther's decision to become a monk was unpremeditated. At this point there is a distinction to be made between the idea that Luther had long premeditated the decision to enter the monastery, and the idea that he naturally, though unconsciously at many points, was influenced toward a decision, however sudden it may have been, by experiences and situations in his early life. Luther himself disproves the former idea by pointing to the suddenness of the decision, and of its compelling character. However little his previous life may have had to do with bringing about the actual decision, we are compelled to trace through his earlier life for an explanation of the positive direction toward which this experience pointed.

1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.I, P.30.

Although the occasion of the thunderstorm is the most popular one considered in connection with Luther's decision to become a monk, there is some difference of opinion even on this.

> Strangely enough, Melanchthon mentions the resolution to become a monk not in connection with the thunderstorm of which he knows nothing but with the sudden death of a friend which took place apparently not long before. Mathesius and Oldecop also mention this incident as well as the thunderstorm, and though both do so with evident inaccuracy of detail, it seems to be historic.[1]

Hieronymus Buntz, one of the graduates in Arts, is said to have died suddenly before the graduation day.

> And Oergel concludes that this was the friend to whom Melanchthon refers, and with whose death he connects Luther's entrance into the monastery.[2]

Luther gives several causes for his decision, but he never mentions it in connection with the death of this friend. If the thunderstorm incident be accepted, which, as Smith shows is the most favorable one, then we shall begin the consideration of the causes at this point.

> If it may seem strange that a young man of twenty-two should be panic stricken by a crack of thunder, it must be remembered that the miner's son regarded such phenomena as

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1.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I,P.33.
2.Ibid.

> frequently occasioned by the direct interposition of the devil. Moreover, it has been shown that he probably had the more than half formed intention already in his mind. He later speaks of being warned to enter the cloister by a heavenly vision. What this was, whether connected with the storm or not, is entirely unknown.[1]

If Luther, as Smith suggests, had already a half formed intention of entering the monastery, then it is strange, as MacKinnon says, that an accident which befell him as he walked with a friend near Erfurt, and threatened him with death from loss of blood during his student career, did not precipitate the crisis. And on another occasion when he was ill to the point of death, Luther himself ascribes to the condition no religious significance.[2] These incidents point strongly toward the idea that Luther had previously thought very little, if any, about entering the monastery. It must be said, however, that between the occurrences of the two mentioned incidents and the time of the decision there had been time enough for a considerable development toward the monastic life. Grisar says:

> Thus the thoughts which had perhaps for long been attracting his serious temperament toward the cloister ripened with overwhelming rapidity.[3]

Let us see if in the very vow itself there is any

1.Smith, Martin Luther, P. 9.
2.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.34
3.Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.4

suggestion of Luther's state of mind. Most authorities give "Help!" as the first utterance in the experience. "Help! beloved Saint Anna, I will become a monk." or as Grisar gives it: "Save me dear Saint Anna, and I will become a monk."[1] In either case the first exclamation indicates clearly a very real fear on the part of Luther. And this fear, when connected with the vow which followed has the bare suggestion that Luther felt an obligation to enter the monastery. The fact that the whole utterance was a sudden exclamation suggests also that Luther had considered before, what he now vows to Saint Anna. This may be what Luther means, when later he says that he was forced or compelled to become a monk, even against his wishes.[2] There is little reason to doubt that fear was basic in the conversion experience, and in the exclamation which accompanied it. We have suggested already something of the place, fear, and superstition held in the life of the German people. Luther, as a child, had been impressed by the picture in Mansfeld church of Jesus sitting on a rainbow with frowning countenance and drawn sword in his hand, coming to judge the wicked.[3] Luther tells us that he entered the monastery because he doubted himself. This doubt

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1.Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P. 4
2.Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VI, P.113
3.Cf.Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.198

must be very closely associated with the fear element, for surely one of the things Luther doubted was that he was able to save himself from a torturing sense of sin. Lindsay does not lend much support to the idea that Luther may have been led into doubts by his contact with the Humanists in Erfurt. Luther, having attended no lectures of the Humanists in Erfurt, may have escaped any direct influence from them. But as we have mentioned in an earlier part of the thesis, Luther was studying scholastic philosophy at the university and at the same time meeting with a group of poets, and reading the great Latin and Greek authors of ancient times. Luther's love for music and the novel was not in keeping with ideal scholasticism. It is not unreasonable to think that Luther, in contrasting these two opposing philosophies in Erfurt, might have thereby planted in his life the seed of discontent and disharmony, and that this seed even as early as the conversion to the monastic life, had grown to play a considerable part in that decision. Smith says that already, that is by 1505, Luther had been asking himself the question:

> When will you be righteous and
> do enough to win a gracious
> God?[1]

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1. Smith, Martin Luther, P. 9.

The seriousness of the plague in Erfurt in the spring of 1505 may easily have added to Luther's fear and sense of self-insufficiency. McGiffert says of Luther:

> He was a serious minded boy. He had been piously trained, and religion was a very real thing to him. His imagination was peopled with angels and demons, and his life was lived in constant dependence upon the aid and protection of the saints. He was emotional by temperament, subject to fits of depression, and exposed to attacks of anxiety and dread as to his fate which at times almost drove him wild. Even as a child he was frequently distressed by his sins and terrified by the fear of eternal punishment. The harsh treatment he was early subjected to had given him a timorous conscience and made him abnormally apprehensive.[1]

Luther says on one occasion, because he "despaired" of himself, therefore did he retire into the monastery. It was his earnest resolution to renounce the freedom of his academic years and to seek peace of soul and reconciliation with God in the bosom of the pious community.[2]

> Luther felt strongly that deep sense of sinfulness which was the ground note of the religious revival of the age in Germany. In deep anxiety for his soul's salvation, he entered the monastery of Augustinian hermits in Erfurt, in July 1505.[3]

Luther's dramatic exclamation did not end with the word "Help!" His appeal to Saint Anna rather

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1.McGiffert, Martin Luther, P.18
2.Grisar, Luther, Vol. I, P.4.
3.Walker, History of the Christian Church, P.337

than to any other Saint, or to Christ directly, is a bit of interesting information which carries significance. It was a very natural thing that he should cry, "Beloved Saint Anna." We have spoken already of how Luther, in his early home training, and even in his home church learned little about Jesus as a loving Saviour. His dominating thought about Jesus, as his words in later life testify, was that he was a stern and cruel judge. We are not to be surprised therefore, that Luther does not call upon Jesus for help. But it is interesting further, to consider why he appealed to Saint Anna. A bit of information about her will help us to understand this. She was the mother of the Virgin Mary. A characteristic of the religious revival of which mention has been made was the thought of Jesus as a stern judge. His intercessory work was thrust into the background.

> Men forgot that he was the Saviour and the Intercessor; and as the human heart craves for someone to intercede for it, another intercessor had to be found. This gracious personality was discovered in the Virgin Mother, who was to be entreated to intercede with her Son on behalf of poor sinning human creatures.[1]

The fear of Jesus as judge gave rise to a rapid spread of devotion to the Mother as intercessor. This thought

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1.Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.135.

of Motherly intercession went further, until the Virgin herself had to be interceded with to induce her to plead with her Son for sinners, and her Mother, Saint Anna, became the object of a cult which spread over Germany. The devotion to the Virgin Mary spread through Germany, France, and Spain, but the cult of Saint Anna was peculiarly German. It had its origin there and manifested its devotion most deeply on German soil.

> Luther himself tells us that 'Saint Anna was his idol.' Her name was graven on many a church bell, and every pull of the ropes and clang of the bell was supposed to be a prayer to her to intercede.[1]

McGiffert suggests that Saint Anna was also patron saint of the miners, and that Luther had often turned to her in times of distress.[2]

We have discussed what Luther's exclamation of "Help!" in connection with his conversion experience indicated regarding his state of mind. And something of the significance of his appeal to Saint Anna has been given. But we have not completed his exclamatory sentence. We have yet to deal with "I will become a monk."

If at this point it may seem that the writer has used the utterance extensively, he does

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1.Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.136
2.Cf.McGiffert, Martin Luther, P. 17

not mean to say that it represents the only indication of the experiences which had anything to do with the conversion. The utterance rather represents points from which we may depart, and also a culmination of certain lines of thought in Luther's life. Because the utterance came as it did - that is suddenly and under unusual circumstances it has double significance, because it better represents the culminating lines of thought, and is rid of any coloring which might have come from premeditation. It indicates a present fright which is easily explainable. It indicates Luther's past training and thought concerning the cult of Saint Anna. And it indicates that Luther had hitherto thought seriously of the monastic life. Because it does deal so plainly with Luther's past, present, and even future plans the writer has seen fit to use it, not exclusively, but as fitting illustrative material.

There is little to say regarding the authenticity of the utterance. If it be questioned on the grounds that nobody was there to witness that Luther even made the utterance, it may likewise be said that there was nobody there to deny that Luther did make it. It is easy to see that the burden of proof is upon those who question its authenticity. We do not know that Luther

did make any such utterance, but since tradition has accepted it so long, and since there is no way of disproving it, we have no right to suppose that Luther was saying anything but the truth when he told people that he had made such utterance.

It is surprising what very little space some biographers give to this latter phase of the conversion. They go into detail with the negative causes of the conversion, but have little to say about the positive influences. If we accept all the fears and doubts of Luther as representing influences in his conversion experience, we still have to explain why he made the positive vow to become a monk. The writer is unwilling to treat the conversion of Luther separate from the positive vow to become a monk. His conversion away from a life of doubts and fears is only one half of the story. Men do not leave the darkness without having perceived the light. Luther's conversion was definitely a conversion to the monastic life, for, as Schaff tells us, Luther was already a Christian.[1] It was not so much a conversion to a new principle of life, as it was a conversion to the monastery as a means through which he could better live the kind of life after which he had long sought. If Luther was frightened by a storm, then we are

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1. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. VI, P.112.

compelled to ask what it was about the storm that brought from his lips the vow to become a monk. What connection is there between the frightfulness of the storm and the vow to become a monk? It is plain that Luther never made a vow that would take him from the life he had led into an utterly different kind of life if he had not believed that the latter offered, in some way, a greater satisfaction. But let us see if, in a review of Luther's early life, he had experiences which might have turned his interest toward the monastery. Again it must be remembered that these suggestions are offered as such, and it should not be interpreted to mean that the writer offers them as absolute proof that Luther was so won to the monastery. On the other hand evidence seems sufficient to justify a reasonable supposition that, through them, Luther might easily have gained a favorable impression of the monastic life. To say that the German people believed the monastic life to be the most ideal, is to generalize beyond the point of accuracy. However, McGiffert, in speaking of the monastery, says:

> For centuries it had appealed with subtle and persuasive eloquence to the finest and most sensitive spirits. The realization of its spiritual purpose might be crude enough in current monasticism and rude indeed the awakening of many a trusting young neophyte. In Luther's day its reputation was by no means unsullied.

> By many a Humanist the follies and stupidities and immoralities of the monks were castigated in rollicking jest or in bitter satire. It was a current proverb, 'What the devil is ashamed to do, a monk does without shame,' and to a contemporary bishop was attributed the saying, 'Into the monastery with him! He is worth nothing either to God or man!'[1]

McGiffert goes on to show, however, that Luther knew nothing of this ridicule. Smith, speaking of the monastery in connection with Luther, says:

> The cloister had been the refuge of such persons for a thousand years; to it the Saxon student turned to find rest for his soul.[2]

Schaff tells us that Luther:

> Became overwhelmed with a sense of vanity of this world and the absorbing importance of saving his soul, which, according to the prevailing notion of his age, he could best secure in the quiet retreat of a cloister.[3]

In Mansfeld the clergy had a good reputation and were held in general respect. We have made mention earlier in the thesis of how Hans Luther was a friend to the priest and a good churchman. McGiffert tells us that the mother of Luther was a reverent admirer of the clergy.[4] There is no conclusive evidence that Luther was influenced toward the monastery by the "Brethren

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1.McGiffert, Martin Luther, P. 19.
2.Smith, Martin Luther, P. 8.
3.Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol VI,P.113
4.Cf. McGiffert, Martin Luther, P. 119

of the Common Life," in Magdeburg where he had attended school one year, but due to the fact that their teaching was definitely religious, and that they actually strove to influence young men toward the monastic life, it is probable that Luther received no bad impression of the monastery from them. Luther's account of the Prince of Anhalt testifies that the sight was one that made onlookers gasp for pity, and made them also ashamed of their worldly position. It is not altogether improbable that in Magdeburg Luther's thoughts were first definitely turned in the direction of the monastic life.[1]

In Eisenach, Luther could associate with the monastery more than one source of many pleasant experiences. On the whole, Luther's stay in Eisenach, as judged from his later writings, was a pleasantly spent three years. He had never been so happy, nor so comfortable since he began his schooling. Neither had Luther ever before had such close and personal contact with the monastery. The wealthy family of Frau Cotta had even founded a small Franciscan monastery at the foot of the Wartburg, with whose inmates Luther became very friendly.[2] Luther's teachers in Eisenach had pleased him, because they were far superior to any of his former ones. The history of Saint Elizabeth was

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1.Cf.Smith, Martin Luther, P. 4.

blazoned on the windows of the Church at Eisenach. It was at Eisenach that the boy Luther had seen, and talked to the young Carthusian, and who the young Luther considered the holiest man to whom he had ever talked.[1] It is altogether unreasonable to think that the young Luther could not have been influenced by the fervent enthusiasm which centered in Eisenach. All of this religious popularity and enthusiasm for Church and monastery, taken together with his pleasant association in the Frau Cotta home, the school with its superior teachers, and the Franciscan monastery where friendly companions lived, could not easily have produced anything but a friendly attitude toward the monastic life.

Nor can we rightly suppose that Luther's contacts in Erfurt with humanists influenced him considerably against the monastery. It is true, as we have already noted, that Luther had his friends in the circle of the "Poets," and that he read with pleasure the works of ancient Latin and Greek scholars. We may even accept the proposition that Luther's contacts with the opposing philosophies (Scholasticism and Humanism) in Erfurt, planted in him the seed of discontent, and still refuse to grant, that up to that time when he leaves

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1.Cf. Lindsay, History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P.198.

the University, he had received from Erfurt a disfavor for the monastery. Erfurt was filled with monasteries and convents, and among these was the famous Augustinian monastery. Although it, like other great monasteries in their prosperity, had been led to laxity and worldliness, was being reformed before the days of Luther in Erfurt.[1] McGiffert says concerning this monastery:

> Of all the monasteries in Erfurt the Augustinian bore the highest reputation for theological learning and public service.[2]

The very fact that Luther, after his conversion experience, comes to Erfurt and becomes a member of this Augustinian order is strong evidence that Erfurt, instead of turning him away from the monastery, had influenced him toward it. It is true that the revision of the constitution which carried a stricter discipline in this monastery was not made until 1504, after Staupitz had become Vicar-General, but the Proles reform had long been working within the Augustinian orders.[3]

In part one we have suggested something of the popularity which the monastery held in Germany, and how it naturally attracted religiously-minded young people. In part two we followed Luther through the monastic communities of Magdeburg, Eisenach, and Erfurt, and showed

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1.Cf.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, P.37.
2.McGiffert, Martin Luther, P. 20.
3.Cf.MacKinnon, Luther and the Reformation, P.37

some of the individual factors which influenced him at these different places. In Magdeburg he was influenced by the Brethren of the Common Life, and greatly impressed by the monastic self-denial as manifested by Prince William of Anhalt. In Eisenach Luther could have been favorably influenced toward the monastery through the Cotta family, and through becoming very friendly with the inmates of the Franciscan monastery there which this wealthy family had founded. In Erfurt Luther came into contact with the greatest monastic center in Germany. In the third part of the thesis we again suggested something of the popular thought regarding the monastery, and suggested further how this must have influenced Luther. Now, only a few words are necessary to indicate that these individual influences in the monastic communities are simply indicative of the general spirit which must have accompanied them. The spiritual power of the monastic community to attract such young people as Luther cannot be explained in any one or more individual factors in that community. The spirit which pervaded the whole community was inescapable. No satisfactory explanation can be given of why Luther chose such strong monastic communities for his training in school if we deny that the spirit of these communities did not attract him. This same power to attract such minds as that of Luther did

not stop with winning one to the community for schooling, but naturally carried the thinking of such young people to the natural conclusion, which was to the monastery. We may look with a considerable degree of assurance to this influence when we begin to search for the major factor which caused Luther to choose the monastic life for himself.

So powerful was the conversion experience of Luther as he journeyed toward Erfurt in 1505, that he was able to repel all the temptations of the dissuading influences and enter the monastery of the Augustinian order of the Eremites, July 17, 1505.

SUMMARY

Summary

Thus we have seen that Luther's environment is characterized, first by a political disunity in Germany, but at the same time evidencing signs of unity, for although Germany was a loose coalition of states, those states were becoming increasingly strong. This political situation was accompanied by social unrest which had its basic cause first, in the economic pressure made by noblemen against peasants, but later came to be more generally considered as rich against poor. The economic pressure which was brought to bear against the poor, however, was only one-half the cause of the unrest, for the spirit of the Renaissance had thrown its light of independence far enough into Germany to reach the common people, and it found expression in the social unrest and rebellion. The religious age is characterized by a crude, but enthusiastic mysticism, which was based upon fear and superstition. Much of the old superstition of ancient times had been uncovered, to find again ready acceptance in this emotional religious revival. Superstition, however, was not all that the Renaissance offered to the religious life of Germany, for the same light of independence which it had thrown upon the old serfdom,

bringing as it did social unrest and rebellion, found expression also in affairs of religion. The people demanded of the priests sermons, and it was not long before social and religious prophets arose to voice the rights of the people in social and religious affairs alike.

It was into such an environment as this that Luther was born and spent his early life. From his childhood days in Mansfeld to the completion of his university life in Erfurt, Luther breathed the air of political disunity, social unrest, and a crude religious enthusiasm. If Luther was too young to sense the social, and the political movements, and thus not be influenced by them, he still could not escape the influence of the religious enthusiasm which swept the whole of Germany, and especially the parts in which Luther spent his childhood and youth. From Luther's home, and from his school in Mansfeld he had suffered from the strict discipline which characterized the age. In Magdeburg and in Eisenach he had come into intimate contact with the spirit of the religious revival. In Magdeburg he was with the Brethren of the Common Life, and in Eisenach he was in the center of a religious revivalism. In the great university at Erfurt he came into contact with

the spirit of the Humanist movement which was making considerable headway in Germany. And although he attended none of their lectures, he was a member of the "Poet" group, and read with pleasure the ancient Greek and Latin authors. In Magdeburg, Luther may have gained a favorable idea of the monastery from the Brethren of the Common Life, for they had influenced many a youth to enter the monastery. In Eisenach Luther lived with Frau Cotta whose family had founded a small monastery there, and with those inmates Luther became very friendly.

There are two aspects expressed in Luther's exclamation "Help! beloved Saint Anna! I will become a monk" which he makes in connection with his conversion experience. First, Luther expresses fear. In his call upon Saint Anna for help, he is revealing the fact that he cannot call upon Christ because he fears him. In the second place, Luther reveals his favor toward the monastery in his vow to become a monk. The conversion experience therefore has a negative aspect and a positive one. Not only was Luther converted away from the fears which dominated much of his life, but he was also converted to the monastic life.

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